



# **Social Licence to Operate in the Waste and Resource Recovery Sector**

**Toolkit**

**Prepared for Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of  
Australia**

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<b>Signature</b>					
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## 1 Purpose

This toolkit defines the guiding principles that will help you understand the concept of Social Licence to Operate (SLO), how it is established and how you maintain it. Establishing (or gaining) and then maintaining a SLO provides you with the basis for ensuring that:

- Your project or operating facility can be financially viable over its lifetime,
- Your local community accepts you,
- The broader community understands the societal value of the project or facility, and the waste and resource recovery industry more broadly, and
- Regulators can have confidence in your stakeholder relationships.

Ensuring that any project your business undertakes has an established and well-maintained SLO is critical to the project's success and longevity, regardless of its scope and size. A well maintained SLO ensures an ongoing positive relationship with the community(s) directly impacted by the operations of the project, and with society at large.

This toolkit has been developed so that it is flexible enough to be applicable for the entire waste and resource recovery industry sector, irrespective of the particular project or facility type. Industries or activities that have the potential to impact the environment either through their size, operations or emissions have the greatest need for good SLO maintenance. This particularly applies to the waste and resource recovery industry given the nature of the materials it manages, processes and recovers.

In the waste and resource recovery sector it is typically landfills, Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities, and compost and organics operations that face the strongest opposition and greatest challenges to societal acceptance. This toolkit will help you establish and maintain your SLO by providing you with an understanding of what SLO is, why maintenance of your SLO is important, the principles that underpin good SLO maintenance, and tools to help you apply these principles in your business practices and planning.

The toolkit provides advice and guidance where genuine and honest attempts are being undertaken to build trust and engage with the community and society, based on a desire to be an active and meaningful participant in both. The approaches described in this toolkit are not necessarily sequential, although they have been ordered in as close to a step-by-step process as possible to convey the general progression required to establish and or maintain a project or facility's SLO. Many of the principles outlined for better-practice SLO establishment and maintenance are required to be actioned simultaneously. The toolkit should be used for an ongoing and active assessment of your SLO. It is important to repeatedly confirm progress and outcomes for each of the toolkit principles, regardless of the stage SLO relationships have progressed to.

The advice and direction provided by this toolkit will not work if it is implemented without adherence to the principles of good SLO maintenance. Evidence suggests that trying to strategically manage SLO to the benefit of the project proponent or facility operator and not the community and society routinely backfires, and creates a worse public image and faster SLO degradation than if the institution had simply not tried to engage community or society in the first place.

Information on where to find ancillary documents and reference materials from other organisations used for this toolkit are provided in the foot notes.

## 2 Glossary

Terms frequently used in the toolkit have the following meanings:

**Community** – The community is the individuals or groups of people who are directly invested in the performance, operations and longevity of a social institution. A more comprehensive definition is provided under Principle 1.

**Energy from Waste (EfW)** – EfW also means waste to energy and generally refers to the process of thermally treating waste materials to recover energy.

**Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria** – ESG criteria refers to a set of standards for business operations that “socially conscious investors” look towards to determine whether they will invest in a company or project. The criteria value high levels of environmental consciousness, good management of relationships with employees, suppliers, customers, and communities, and transparent and equitable high-level decision making.<sup>1</sup>

**Project** – A business initiative or otherwise planned undertaking by government, private industry or a partnership between them. For the purposes of this toolkit, this term will also refer to a social institution that is attempting to establish or maintain SLO and it encompasses all stages of development and operation.

**Precautionary Principle** – An approach to environmental policy that is defined by the EU Parliament as “adopting precautionary measures when scientific evidence about an environmental or human health hazard is uncertain and the stakes are high.”<sup>2</sup>

**Social institution** – A social institution is defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as a way of referring to “complex social forms that reproduce themselves such as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems.”<sup>3</sup>

**Stakeholders** – The entities that are invested in a social institution and have a role in its viability. This could be at any stage of its activities including planning, approval, commissioning, operation, and decommissioning.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, Gordon and Ariel Courage, ‘Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Criteria’ (2022), *Investopedia*, URL = < [<sup>2</sup> Bourguignon, Didier, ‘The precautionary principle: Definitions, applications and governance’ \(2015\), \*Think Tank: European Parliament\*, URL = <\[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\\_IDA\\(2015\\)573876\]\(https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\_IDA\(2015\)573876\)>](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/environmental-social-and-governance-esg-criteria.asp#:~:text=Environmental%2C%20social%2C%20and%20governance%20(ESG)%20criteria%20are%20a,as%20a%20steward%20of%20nature.></a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

<sup>3</sup> Miller, Seumas, “Social Institutions”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/social-institutions/>>.

## 3 Background

### 3.1 What does social licence to operate mean?

Social licence to operate (SLO) reflects the social acceptance, not necessarily the approval, of your project or facility by your neighbours and the broader community. It reflects their perspective and frames your interactions with them. It can be thought of as a form of social contract derived from the aligning values of a social institution and the community.<sup>4</sup> SLO is a means of conceptualising the gaining and maintenance of support for a social institution's activities based on the relationships it has with the people it affects. It can be viewed as being formalised through an organised and negotiated deal to help define the nature of those relationships.<sup>5</sup> At its core it is about your social institution being a good neighbour.

A social institution can be anything from an individual project, activity, facility or industry, to something as abstract as a legal system or organised sport. For the purposes of this toolkit, your social institution is referred to as your project or facility, as these are the forms it is most likely to take. The guidance provided is designed to be applicable to your activities in managing waste or recovering resources regardless of the size of your proposed or actual operation.

While a SLO is only pseudo-contractual in nature, its establishment and the impacts of its maintenance (and if maintenance is performed poorly, its loss) can be felt throughout the day-to-day operations of the project that holds the SLO. The loss of SLO by a project can also have wider ramifications for a sector or the whole of an industry.

### 3.2 Who issues your SLO?

A SLO is not something tangible that is issued but instead is a way of conceiving the relationship between a project and the people who will interact with and can be affected by its operations.<sup>3</sup>

A SLO should be established early so that it exists from the moment the community that is affected by a project, or society at large, becomes aware of its effect. It is important from this very early stage in the life of a project or activity that the project administrators and/or investors understand and accept the responsibility of maintaining the SLO. This needs to continue for as long as the project is operational, and sometimes (depending on the social, community or environmental impacts of its operation) after the project has ceased operating.

Whilst a SLO is not issued as such, it can be revoked by a community or society if genuine and sustained effort is not put into maintaining it.

### 3.3 Why is SLO important?

The establishment and maintenance of a SLO can make or break a project. It is generally understood domestically and internationally that SLO maintenance is crucial to ensuring project longevity and industry stability. It is recognised as a fundamental component of ensuring humane business practices and economic growth across the globe. Information about SLO and guidance in its application and

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<sup>4</sup> Edwards, P., Trafford, S., 'Social licence in New Zealand – what is it?' (2016), *J. R. Soc. New Zealand*, 1–16.

<sup>5</sup> Gunningham, N., Kagan, R.A., Thornton, D., 'Social licence and environmental protection: why businesses go beyond compliance' (2004), *Law Soc. Inquiry*, 29 (2), 307–341.

maintenance has been developed by the European Union<sup>6</sup> and is reflected in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.<sup>7</sup>

Across Australia, waste management and resource recovery projects such as landfills and EfW are subject to a high level of scrutiny from the communities that they are proposed to be located in, even during a project's early design stage. Further, that scrutiny is maintained throughout the operations of these and other types of waste facilities. There are many reasons that community resistance towards waste and resource recovery projects can occur, ranging from concerns about visual and amenity impacts, cleanliness, and intrusive odours and air pollution, to broader concerns about the financial viability and potential environmental and economic impacts of waste management projects.

The Queensland government *Stakeholder Engagement Guide* (2021) identifies the importance of SLO to a project as it reflects the acceptance and ongoing approval of the local community and other stakeholders. It also identifies the importance of well-designed stakeholder engagement that seeks to determine whether the project is likely to receive a social licence from the community. In fact, SLO is so important to a project's success that if after best efforts it can't be established, it is suggested that the project owner should consider whether it is worthwhile progressing.<sup>8</sup>

Loss of SLO and the resultant community outrage that often accompanies it can motivate regulators and governments to act against a sector or facility. For example, in New South Wales, the ban on greyhound racing in 2016 was informed by the Special Commission of Inquiry into the Greyhound Racing Industry in NSW report, where Justice Michael McHugh noted that "Social institutions – whether industries, corporations, businesses or organised sports – must answer to the wider community for their behaviour and that they have a "social licence" to operate only as long as they perform in accordance with public expectations."<sup>9</sup>

If not managed correctly loss of SLO can be very time consuming, expensive, result in a project not being approved, or if existing, subject to strict regulatory oversight and 'poison the well' for future similar projects.

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<sup>6</sup> Tost, M., P. Lesser, G. Poelzer, U. Akhouri, K. Gugerell, 'Social Licence to Operate (SLO) Guidelines for Europe' (2021), *MIREU: Mining and Metallurgy Regions of EU*, URL = <<https://mireu.eu/slo>>

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, 'UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights' (2011), Geneva, Switzerland, URL = <[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf)>

<sup>8</sup> State of Queensland, 'Stakeholder Engagement Guide: Business Case Development Framework' (2021), Release 3, the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, June 2021

<sup>9</sup> McHugh, M., 'Special Commission of Inquiry into the Greyhound Racing Industry in New South Wales: Volume 1' (2016) Report, State of NSW, 16 June.



## 4 SLO Principles

The study of SLO, and the methods and tools that work best for its establishment and maintenance, is an evolving field. Academic and government literature indicate that there is no universal or single ‘best practice’ method for establishing and maintaining SLO. Better practice SLO establishment and maintenance requires well-meaning, consistent, and open relationships with the public in the many forms that they will interact with your project.

As a guide to better practice for SLO strategy and planning, this toolkit identifies eight (8) core principles that underpin the development and maintenance of a SLO and the relationships that will support it. This toolkit provides guidance in understanding these principles, how they relate to establishing and maintaining your SLO, and the accepted and recognised tools and methods you will need to complete these stages.

When utilising this toolkit and following its principles, the circumstances of your specific project should be considered throughout. Adaptation of methods and critical thinking about your project or facility’s social role, from its place in its immediate geographical community through to broader society, are necessary for building, understanding, and strengthening the relationships that you seek to create.

The principles aren’t necessarily sequential in their application. They inform each other; several of them overlap or should be done simultaneously. The crucial point is that they all need to be considered and applied in order to establish and maintain your SLO.

## 4.1 Principle 1: Know your Stakeholders

Stakeholders represent the individuals and groups that will most directly affect your ability to establish and maintain your SLO. SLO stakeholders can include a variety of people and collectives, including some that may fall outside of your normal stakeholder mapping. SLO is primarily about managing your relationships with those who are affected by your business, with a focus on the people and groups who are your closest physical neighbours for your project or site operations. For this reason, SLO stakeholders can sometimes include unlikely alliances between individuals or groups who may ordinarily not be aligned but find unity over the shared cause of their interest in or opposition to your project.

For the purposes of this toolkit, SLO stakeholders are divided into two overarching categories. You are encouraged to codify your SLO stakeholders in this way to help prioritise your engagement when designing your stakeholder mapping. The two categories of stakeholders for SLO management are Active Stakeholders and Passive Stakeholders.

### Active Stakeholders

Active Stakeholders are the stakeholders that require immediate engagement when attempting to establish or maintain SLO. These stakeholders are those most directly affected by, interested in, or opposed to the location, construction, and operation of your project, and therefore provide it with its SLO. Groups of Active Stakeholders can sometimes constitute a loose coalition of individuals who gravitate or connect around a particular issue or personal concern. At other times, Active Stakeholders can be a collective that is organised around or significantly influenced by a specific personality, such as a politician, celebrity or social media influencer. This group of Active Stakeholders may then champion that person's ideals or interests on their behalf.

SLO comes from the people your project affects (directly or indirectly), regardless of whether that is because they are directly impacted by project operations or externalities, or because the project's operations or externalities fall within the boundaries of an area of personal interest, advocacy, or belief. For this reason, Active Stakeholders need to be the first stakeholders you engage with for SLO establishment and maintenance.

Your initial Active stakeholders are comprised of:

- The Community(s):
  - The individuals and groups who are directly invested in the project's existence, either in support or opposition.
  - This can include a community from a geographic area around the project, particularly the immediate neighbours, or it could include specific interest groups such as activists, unions, NGOs, or community groups.
  - More than one community can engage with a project in a way that affects the establishment or maintenance of SLO (e.g., a local community may organise with a national protest group to oppose a facility).
- Individuals of standing or significance
  - These can be people in a community with social power or a following of some kind who can readily mobilise and recruit others to their cause.
  - These stakeholders can also be people who may or may not be from the local community but have enough social power and support from the public to form alliances around supporting their views or positions.
  - This can include local politicians, figures of cultural significance (e.g., sports people, entertainers, media commentators, etc.), or even individuals with a high degree of social media literacy and reach.
- Society:

- The broader public including people who may have views (positive or negative) about the project, activity, or industry.
- They observe the relationship between the community(s) and the project and its proposed activities, and then go on to make up the public perception of, and discourse surrounding, the project.
- Society can also be even more directly involved in the SLO of a project when that institution's operations would affect a commonly agreed upon social norm or goal.
- An example of this is the mining and fossil fuel industries affecting international emissions reduction targets through their operations and products and the public opposition to fracking for coal seam gas that was mobilised across jurisdictions.

It is important to note that Active Stakeholders are not necessarily always people who live or spend time geographically close to your project. Active Stakeholders can take the form of national or international organisations or concerned citizens from a different state or territory if your operations have attracted their attention in a way that invests them in your project. It's important to address and engage with Active Stakeholders as a core part of your SLO establishment and maintenance efforts, but not all Active Stakeholders will require the same level of commitment in your engagement with them. Understanding the power and influence of an Active Stakeholder is fundamental to understanding how their perspective on your project will affect your SLO.

### Passive Stakeholders

Passive Stakeholders are stakeholders that are not the primary targets of your SLO establishment or maintenance strategy, but may become directly invested in the SLO of your project over time depending on how it is received by Active Stakeholders. These stakeholders can affect the longevity and operations of a project as a response to the level of acceptance displayed by Active Stakeholders.

The term 'passive' in this instance refers to the fact that these stakeholders, whilst a part of the establishment and maintenance of SLO, are not actively engaged in the SLO of your project from the beginning. Instead, Passive Stakeholders are initial observers who will be engaged and 'activated' by existing Active Stakeholders depending on how you go about establishing or maintaining your SLO. This 'activation' can be directly inspired or sought out by Active Stakeholders through their direct engagement of the Passive Stakeholders, but it can also be done on the Passive Stakeholders' own accord in response to their observations of Active Stakeholder interaction with your project.

When a Passive Stakeholder is 'activated' they become an Active Stakeholder, swapping categories in your stakeholder mapping along with their role in your SLO relationships. Instead of being observers, they will become fundamental stakeholders whose engagement is required to ensure better-practice SLO establishment and maintenance. Whether a Passive Stakeholder becoming an Active Stakeholder is beneficial or detrimental to the SLO of your project is contextual to their reason for being involved. If a Passive Stakeholder is about to become an Active Stakeholder, you should consider your actions for SLO establishment and maintenance carefully and determine whether their activation is favourable to your attempts to establish or maintain SLO, or whether it will hamper them.

Your initial Passive Stakeholders are comprised of:

- Regulatory and Authority Bodies:
  - This includes local, state, and federal governments, including the individual departments and regulators that affect your industry.
  - Can include politicians when they are responding to community outreach or outrage about an issue.
  - They set policy and legislation, authorise or determine approvals and regulate the operational activities.

- They are directly responsive and responsible to the community. This group can affect development approval, degree of regulation, and economic measures that impact the project.
- Investors:
  - Increasingly will consider the Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) approach of the company and the project, the potential return on investment and how it might be threatened and, the sustainability or viability of the activity.
- Suppliers, clients, and customers:
  - This group represents a project’s supply chain and consumers. Their engagement with a project in the context of SLO will be impacted by reputational considerations, the potential for brand impact, and/or personal or collective ethics and moral obligations.
- Competitors:
  - Competitor projects, including either businesses, or depending on the approach of the jurisdiction you are operating in, government, will gauge their ability to compete on how well you maintain your SLO.
  - This can take the form of either companies within the same industry or companies in adjacent industries who provide the same or similar service and those that can provide an alternative service.

#### 4.1.1 How to apply this principle to establishing your SLO

Knowing your SLO stakeholders means knowing the groups or entities that make up the Active and Passive stakeholder categories, and how they directly or indirectly affect the viability of a project or facility. To gather this information, you should undertake a stakeholder analysis by combining preliminary desktop research into the area where your project or facility will be located and categorising the stakeholder groups you identify respectively as either Active or Passive. Table 4.1 below provides an example of how to organise your stakeholder engagement efforts into a simple table.

**Table 4.1: Principal 1 Guidance: Example Stakeholder Engagement Identification Table**

Stakeholder	Active or Passive?	Stakeholder Group	What outcomes are they after?
Community Group A	Active	Community	Clean air, less noise, more public amenities
Local Councillor or Member of Parliament	Active	Individual of standing or significance	Supportive community, best use of public land, private sector commitment to community-based projects, local jobs, improved amenity or social cohesion
State Government	Passive	Government	Increased economic development in the facility’s region

Planning Authority - Local council, planning approval body, or government department	Passive	Government or independent bodies appointed by government	Development that meets local, state or federal land use planning policies, rules, codes and legislation.
Concerned Citizen with Active Social Media Presence	Active	Individual of standing or significance	Increased corporate environmental stewardship, long term economic investment in their community
Community Group B	Active	Community	More public amenities
Corporation A	Passive	Customer	Product/s that meet their needs from a brand they can trust.
Investors	Passive	Investor	Return on investment, community good will towards the industry, sustainability

#### 4.1.2 How to apply this principle to maintaining your SLO

Typically, facility operators establish a community consultative committee as an efficient way of keeping stakeholders informed or engaged in its operations. However, this is the minimum you will need to do to maintain SLO. Your stakeholders will change over the lifetime of your operations, as local land use changes, community demographics or your neighbours change, socio-political issues gain or lose relevancy, and environmental and economic externalities effect your business and the area it is located in.

It is important to keep an up-to-date account of which stakeholder groups are important to maintaining your SLO, and what their core concerns are, so that you know which groups or individuals you will need to directly engage with. Community engagement strategies, as outlined in Principles 3 and 4, are a core method of developing a robust understanding of your relevant stakeholders. You should return to your initial method of stakeholder identification (such as the example provided in Table 4.1) and update it with the information you have gathered.

Another strategy for stakeholder upkeep is to organise for your media or communications people to keep account of any new stakeholders using dedicated research. This can be done by observing trends in engagement both through social media posts and through the social networks of those who engage with the posts. You should also stay abreast of news and interest articles relating to your activity or industry, and research the individuals or groups that are asked for comment.

It is in your best interest to engage with organised or semi-organised groups and their representatives, such as an activist group or the local community leaders. Individuals who are respected, listened to or have a high profile within a community or society at large can become important stakeholders. Individuals and groups will form around them based on their actual or perceived shared interests.

#### 4.1.3 Action Points

- Undertake research and analysis to create a record of Active and Passive Stakeholders
- Establish a consultative committee
- Maintain up to date account of stakeholder groups
- Keep account of new stakeholders and engage them early
- Engage with organised or semi-organised groups

## 4.2 Principle 2: Reciprocity, or ‘give back what you take’

When you enter into a community, regardless of the scope of your project or business operations within that community, you should do so with the intent to return the benefits to the community in a way that directly relates to how it will be impacted. Avoiding impacts is of course a prerequisite. However, this principle goes beyond compliance. It defines your approach to the others outlined in this toolkit. It requires commitment, honesty and transparency and it will set the tone for what follows, particularly your community engagement strategy.

Reciprocity can also be thought of in the long-term life of a project as being a good neighbour. This is more than the direct and indirect economic benefits, such as jobs that the activity may bring to the local area. It means being transparent and accountable to the community, meeting their continued support with your own, being accountable for your decision making, keeping your promises, and acknowledging then addressing any mistakes that occur.

In its 2021 *Energy from Waste Guideline*, the Queensland Government outlines some strategies for ensuring good neighbourly conduct with your community(s) as a project operator.<sup>10</sup> This can be used as an additional resource for understanding the scope of what being a good neighbour is outside of the examples provided by this toolkit. Some of the additional methods for ensuring your SLO establishment and maintenance fit the good neighbour model. To formalise how you will realise what it is to be a good neighbour and how you will give back what you take, develop a written agreement with your community. Alternatively, the Queensland EfW Guideline refers to developing a Charter with the community.

An even more accountable approach is to enter into a contract or compact with your community. A written contract goes beyond relying on trust. The process also requires both sides to negotiate an agreed position and in doing so to moderate their claims. If you can’t write a contract, try and find ways to build accountability into your efforts. Applying the principles and approaches in this toolkit isn’t easy, it will take time and resources. Having a written agreement in some form is the best way to ensure the results of your efforts are agreed, recorded, and your accountability is demonstrated. It can also be used to measure and demonstrate performance.

### 4.2.1 How to apply this principle to establishing SLO

An established way to properly determine how a project operator can address the impacts their project has on Stakeholders is by undertaking a Social Impact Assessment (SIA). You should perform a SIA for your project as a means of determining how you can develop a reciprocal relationship with your local community. A SIA is undertaken at the outset of a project during its planning stage. It is an important first step in understanding the affect your project will have on a community, and what you can do to mitigate negative impacts from operations or externalities that are undesirable for the community.

#### 4.2.1.1 What is a Social Impact Assessment?

The International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA), describes a SIA as including “the processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social

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<sup>10</sup> Queensland Government, *Guideline: Energy from Waste (2021)*, Version 1.00, URL = <  
[https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/227241/waste-strategy-guideline-energy-from-waste.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/227241/waste-strategy-guideline-energy-from-waste.pdf)>

change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment.”<sup>11</sup> A SIA is used to identify and assess how a project will impact a community’s current and future, needs, services or facilities. Whilst not formally required for all waste and resource recovery projects, undertaking a SIA will provide you with the information, knowledge and understanding necessary to inform how you can begin developing your SLO maintenance plan. SIA and SLO shouldn’t be confused with each other; whilst performing a SIA can lead to better SLO establishment and maintenance than not performing one, a SIA cannot be used as a method of gaining SLO in its own right. It must be done in conjunction with the other methods and principles for SLO establishment and maintenance outlined in this toolkit.

Most state and many local governments in Australia require some form of SIA through their land use planning requirements and approval systems. In NSW, projects determined as State Significant Development are required to undertake a SIA to obtain planning approval. Queensland also has a mandatory requirement for a SIA to be performed for any project that requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In support of this, the NSW and Queensland state governments have produced guidelines that reflect best-practice methods for undertaking SIA. These are accessible through the NSW Department of Planning and Environment<sup>12</sup> and the Queensland State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning<sup>13</sup> websites respectively.

SIA is a comprehensive measurement of analysis, requiring a detailed description of its principles and methodology in order to understand how it is done. You should adapt any SIA you undertake to suit the size and scope of your project. This toolkit does not go into the details of how to perform one. You are encouraged to use the relevant state or local government SIA guidelines for the community in which your project will be based, or alternatively the ‘International Principles for Social Impact Assessment’ published by the IAIA to inform the design of your own SIA approach.<sup>14</sup> This document can be accessed free of charge from the IAIA website.

#### 4.2.1.2 Why is a SIA useful for Reciprocity?

A SIA helps you to understand the negative impacts of your project on the community and society at large and encourages you to consider how you can go about alleviating, reducing, or otherwise mitigating those impacts. It’s important to understand that reciprocity is not a process of entering a community and ‘buying it off’ to win support. Rather, reciprocity underpins the ongoing process of SLO maintenance; it means that however or whenever your project impacts the community in an adverse way, you seek to return benefits to the community in a way that the impacted community finds acceptable.

For example, a common concern about new developments is that land that is perceived to be available for general public amenity, or is part of the natural topography and character of the area, is committed to a project and lost. Community opposition is usually on two grounds, the first being that the project

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<sup>11</sup> Esteves, A. M. and F. Vanclay, ‘Social Impact Assessment’, *International Association for Impact Assessment*, (2022), URL = <<https://www.iaia.org/wiki-details.php?ID=23>>

<sup>12</sup> NSW Department of Planning and Environment, ‘Social Impact Assessment’ (2022), URL = <<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Under-review-and-new-Policy-and-Legislation/Social-Impact-Assessment>>

<sup>13</sup> Queensland State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, ‘Social impact assessment’ (2021), URL = <<https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/coordinator-general/strong-and-sustainable-resource-communities/social-impact-assessment>>

<sup>14</sup> Vanclay, Frank, ‘International Principles for Social Impact Assessment’ (2003), *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 21(1), pp. 5 – 11, URL = <<https://www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/IAIA-SIA-International-Principles.pdf>>



disrupts the natural ecosystem, and the second that the community will dislike what the land is being used for (e.g., waste facilities can be viewed as polluting or a 'dirty' industry). Concerns about expansion of existing facilities can be around long-term environmental and health impacts or loss of amenity. These views will inform community disapproval of the land use.

The reciprocity principle can be actualised in many different ways. Applying the principle in practice means developing a plan to address these concerns directly, or indirectly if that's not possible, by providing what you can to alleviate the loss that the community is experiencing. If a community is concerned about the loss of amenities from the use of land, a plan to invest in the creation of local amenities could be an acceptable solution. One of the more well-known examples of this from the resource recovery sector, both for its scale and its community acceptance is CopenHill, a Danish EfW facility that also provides a number of dining and entertainment public facilities including a ski slope. See Section 5 for more details.

This is not to imply that you need a similar approach or scale of investment to adhere to the reciprocity principle; you can aim small and still achieve a reciprocal relationship with your community. Whatever the scale, having the community involved in the decision making is what's most important to upholding Principle 2 in your SLO establishment strategy. You should use the results of your SIA to gather the information about the kind of initiatives you can undertake that would meet the community's needs. In doing this be as expansive as possible. Your objective is that your community sees a net benefit from its perspective when it weighs the impacts of the activity against the outcomes. You will need to think broadly and consult widely to achieve this, as applying this principle will vary depending on the nature of your project.

#### 4.2.2 How to apply this principle to maintaining SLO

Applying the principle of reciprocity consistently throughout your SLO maintenance strategy is important to keeping a good relationship with the community and society. It's not sufficient to only be thinking of what the community needs from you and your business before seeking development approval or establishing operations; you must evolve and grow as a part of the community and share its needs and desires, otherwise you risk being seen as taking advantage of their good will. As you'll have an established facility at this point, the important part of SLO maintenance is making sure that you acknowledge your business as a part of the local community, that this fact is very important to you, and that you publicly and privately display this through your actions.

Flexibility is also important for successful reciprocal practices. The needs of a community can change over time, and it is important to reflect these changes in the ways in which you decide to participate in the community. Getting direct feedback from the community about what they would like you to do is very important for revising any plans to assist the community, and it is equally critical to acknowledge that feedback and explain how the decisions you have made have been based on it.

*Example: A landfilling company that has operated in a town for many years wishes to make an expansion to its operations. The local community has to date been supportive of the operations and the company, but is against this expansion. Opposition is so strong that an activist group is formed by locals to assist in organising the community resistance to the expansion. When the company engages with the local stakeholders, it finds that the principal concern of the locals is the belief that the expansion will lead to environmental damage and a loss of habitat for local animals. Stakeholders indicate that they would be willing to see the landfill expanded, if there was a dedicated environmental reserve established locally so that fauna and flora could be safe from future land use change.*

In the above example, the landfilling company is given the opportunity to show that it is a valued community member by investing a portion of its capital into providing a reserved area for the protection of local wildlife. A commitment such as this will engender respect as it demonstrates a desire to be an active part of the community, not simply concerned with profit making. Adherence to

the principle of reciprocity is necessary to prove your good will to your neighbours, and because being a good neighbour is an active relationship, it is necessary to work at and maintain a flexible approach to that relationship. Sticking to a single plan of action or ceasing your efforts to participate in the community are likely to undermine your SLO.

#### 4.2.3 Action Points

- Undertake a Social Impact Assessment (relative to the scale of your project)
- Utilise your consultative committee to engage with your Active Stakeholders
- Analyse the data collected to determine the impacts of most concern to the community
- Use the information to design and modify your impact mitigation strategies and responses to community concerns
- Test your strategies and responses with your community and modify according to their views

### **4.3 Principle 3: Engagement must be genuine, meaningful, empowering, and ongoing**

It is essential to know all your stakeholders well, and to know your community stakeholders intimately and to keep this knowledge and information up to date. Understanding the concerns of the community is of the utmost importance for ensuring SLO, as their perspective will often inform the perspectives of other stakeholders, both Passive and Active. Your engagement should be as face-to-face as possible, and respectful; it is important to ask what the community wants out of a project, and to be honest about your motivations and intent as a business, your accountability to shareholders and investors and your responsibility to customers and employees.

#### **4.3.1 How to apply this principle to establishing SLO**

Once you have your stakeholders categorised and have identified their interests to the best of your ability, it is time to begin engaging with them. Your priority with SLO-based stakeholder engagement is to directly engage with community stakeholders, as they are the most immediately accessible active stakeholders.

##### **4.3.1.1 Engaging with Community Stakeholders**

Stakeholder engagement can take many different forms, and it should be based on the requirements of the community(s) you are engaging with. Using the information gathered from your SIA, you should have a good understanding of how your project is going to affect the community(s) in the surrounding areas, and to what extent. You can use this information to prioritise your process of stakeholder engagement and select the stakeholder engagement tools that you wish to use.

Some methods of stakeholder engagement are more fit for purpose than others. Whilst not a comprehensive list, methods of stakeholder engagement that could be a good fit for your community are included in Table 4.3. When selecting a stakeholder engagement method, you should be considering whether the method of delivery is in line with your community(s) circumstances, needs, and values. For example, if a community is dispersed over a large area, it might be impractical to organise regular town hall meetings to discuss your project, and it might be better practice to establish a focus group and do follow-up surveys. Applying Principle 3 effectively means actively tailoring your attempts at engagement in an honest way to the requirements of the community you are entering and demonstrating that you value their views and suggestions.

Adhering to Principle 3 also means that you do not just simply collect data and then apply your existing ideas regardless of the information the analysis provides. You must be willing to respond to community desires and feedback as you are made aware of it and do so transparently and in a timely manner. In doing so, try to accommodate and modify your plans for reciprocity as much as possible. You may find that the community will come up with impacts and ideas for your involvement as a neighbour that had not been previously broached in your SLO work up to this point. You should maintain an open mind to these new ideas and try to involve the community in how you direct your strategy for gaining SLO by empowering them to make decisions about how they want you to engage with them.

A core component of being genuine in your engagement is also being honest with the community. Open dialogue is important and communicating directly with as little technical jargon about the who, what, where, when, how, and why of your project, and SLO plans, are key to developing an honest and positive relationship with your community. You also should not be afraid of being open with the community about which of their desires, despite your best attempts, cannot be met. If the community requests something that is overwhelmingly outside of your control or ability to meet, you need to

explain why you cannot deliver on that need. If the community requests something from you that you can do, but would not be feasible with the project, it should be explained plainly and directly with as little complex language or jargon as possible. Being up-front and clear is paramount for developing a good trusting relationship that lasts for the long-term.

**Table 4.3: Methods of Stakeholder Engagement for Gaining SLO - Communities**

Method	Pros	Cons
Surveys	<p>Low resource and time burden.</p> <p>Data can be easily analysed and interpreted after collection</p> <p>Able to mix methods (ask qualitative and quantitative questions).</p> <p>Able to cover wide areas in a cost-effective manner.</p> <p>Enables ‘quieter’ voices to have their views captured.</p> <p>Could provide preliminary information that can be readily built upon.</p>	<p>Detached method of communication.</p> <p>No guarantee of completion, participant interest, or data return.</p> <p>Depending on the method of dispersal, could be considered discourteous.</p> <p>Entirely driven by you; no community collaboration unless you empower them in the design phase.</p>
Targeted Focus Groups	<p>Limited long-term involvement meaning reduced costs and time burden.</p> <p>Diversity of opinion allows for the gathering of an aggregated cross-section response from the community.</p> <p>Qualitative responses can be fleshed out; allows for follow up questions.</p> <p>Participants have guaranteed interest in subject matter.</p> <p>Can be the basis for an ongoing Community Consultative Committee.</p>	<p>Requires a skilled and experienced moderator that is trusted.</p> <p>Answers need to be recorded and interpreted – data not easily analysed immediately after collection.</p> <p>Data can be skewed by interpersonal nature of participation (big personalities can rule over the group).</p> <p>Requires an understanding of community demographics and diligent selection of participants to encourage responsiveness and get meaningful input.</p> <p>Limited to no ability to collect quantitative data.</p> <p>Limited ability to empower the community with decision making long-term.</p>
Town Hall Forum	<p>Can allow for maximal communication of community wants and desires; everyone has</p>	<p>Challenging to organise effectively (notifications, location, timing etc.)</p>

	<p>an opportunity to have their voice heard and to hear the views of others.</p> <p>Ample opportunities for community empowerment or collaboration at both the design and execution phase.</p> <p>Wide variety of perspectives and voices allows for broader views to emerge.</p> <p>Can be a good starting point for a more focussed approach or ongoing process.</p>	<p>Requires skilled, experienced, and trusted moderator.</p> <p>Can be dominated by individuals or specific groups with data and results becoming unrepresentative.</p> <p>Requires dedication to follow-up on outcomes with participants.</p> <p>Primarily a qualitative medium; very limited ability to get quantitative data &amp; analysis of results will take longer.</p>
<p>Continuous Groups / Committees</p> <p>Focus Local</p>	<p>Allows for specific issues to be unpacked and considered across multiple sessions.</p> <p>Diversity of opinion allows for the gathering of an aggregated cross-section response from the community.</p> <p>Participants have a guaranteed interest in the subject matter.</p> <p>If participants are sampled correctly, can accommodate very stratified opinions and be used for reaching compromise between supporters and detractors.</p> <p>Greater potential for community empowerment than Targeted Focus Groups; participants can reach out to others in their community and be their representatives.</p> <p>Facilitates follow-up on issues and progress reporting of actions.</p>	<p>Requires long-term time commitments from participants; potential to break down over participant drop off.</p> <p>Needs dedicated budget with length of time active affecting cost.</p> <p>Requires a skilled and experienced moderator that is trusted.</p> <p>Answers need to be recorded and interpreted – data not easily analysed immediately after collection.</p> <p>Data can be skewed by interpersonal nature of participation (big personalities can rule over the group).</p> <p>Requires an understanding of community demographics and diligent selection of participants to encourage responsiveness and get meaningful input.</p> <p>Limited to no ability to collect quantitative data.</p>

#### 4.3.1.2 Engaging with Society as a Stakeholder

Having a good strategy for SLO stakeholder engagement with broader society is very important for large scale or complex projects, such as state-significant developments or projects of national importance. Whilst the same principle of being genuine, meaningful, empowering, and consistent in

your engagement applies, the methods that you choose to use to engage with society, owing to the scope of the engagement, will be markedly different. Instead of a face-to-face approach, stakeholder engagement with broader society should be performed through existing communication channels with additional research only being undertaken when necessary to understand current or shifting views.

Engaging with society as a stakeholder, helps you to understand the way that your activity or industry is perceived and its broader influence. To do this you can focus on the interactions with and response to your communications through social and mainstream media, as well as the results from market research into public perceptions of your business, project, or industry. The most important part of gaining SLO with society is showing that you are willing to be transparent and communicate honestly about your industry, project, or business. Representing data or information in a way that may be misleading or could later be seen or proven to be exaggerated or untrue, will deal a significant amount more damage to your SLO maintenance than any perceived benefit. Therefore, it is important to be thorough and honest when presenting information to broader society, and to be active and publicly vocal in correcting any misconceptions that might have arisen through previous communications or the statements of others.

Any public relations you undertake should focus on minimising marketing tactics and heightening the visibility of your reciprocal actions, community engagement and your relationships within the community and society. This does not mean you have to hire a brand representative to be everyone's friend online; transparency is more valuable for SLO than relatability. To gain your SLO with broader society you should make sure the public understands what you do and how you do it with honesty and integrity.

#### **4.3.2 How to apply this principle to maintaining SLO**

Consistent and ongoing effort is critical to SLO maintenance, and your engagement with the community should continue after your SLO has been established. This is particularly true when engaging with society at large; you should focus on making sure that your engagement strategy when gaining SLO is continued and modified to be in line with what is required from a social perspective, as well as the ongoing feedback received. For ongoing engagement, however, your engagement strategy for SLO maintenance needs to differ significantly from your strategy for establishing SLO because your relationship with the community is now distinctly different.

You and your project are now neighbours to the community, and your strategy for engagement needs to change to be more involved directly in community activities wherever possible. This is addressed in further detail under Principle 4, but it will primarily involve being present for and knowledgeable about community decisions and changes and showing investment in the wellbeing of the community. It will also involve listening to and empowering your facility workers, as they can be the most direct link that you have to your relevant community groups.

Giving employees, especially those who live locally and those who are not part of the managerial structure of your project or facility, the ability to express their perspectives and opinions on the trajectory of the project or operations of the facility and how it can serve the community will enable you to maintain your SLO with greater efficiency. This empowerment should primarily take place through dedicated meetings between management and employees held during work hours to keep employees up to date on company operations, clarify any misunderstandings, and hear feedback and suggestions. You should also empower your employees through encouraging workplace organisation and community initiative participation. As with gaining SLO, maintaining it requires that the empowered community is engaged with sincerely and openly.

### 4.3.3 Additional Resources

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has created a paid resource in the form of an Engagement Methods Tool that can help you design your engagement strategy in full, including suggestions for methods of engagement that are context, objective, influence, budget, and scale sensitive. The Engagement Methods Tool can be found on the IAP2 website through the following URL: <https://iap2.org.au/resources/engagement-methods-tool/>.

### 4.3.4 Action Points

- Design (or contract the design) of research methodologies that best suit your Active Stakeholder groups and will collect data on their concerns, desires, and needs
- Utilise your consultative committee to engage again with Active Stakeholder groups
- Approach your engagement with dedication, consistency, and openness
- Revise your engagement strategies regularly over the duration of project operations to suit the requirements of the relationships you have formed with Active Stakeholders

## 4.4 Principle 4: Work in and with your community

This principle is the basis for proving to the community that you are a good neighbour. Businesses are social institutions in that they exist within society and people interact with them. This interaction can be in both a material or non-material way; a business can sell things and employ people, but it can also incentivise investment and growth in an area or provide a sense of identity to a community. Although your local community may not be your direct customer, (but for waste and resource recovery facilities, it could be your supplier) forming a strong relationship with it is just as important to business success and viability.

### 4.4.1 Turning community experience into actions

When you are entering a community, you should prioritise involving and empowering your new neighbours with your project on their terms. As outlined under Principle 3, you should design your engagement methods and SIA research to prioritise the convenience of the community(s) you are entering. It is also necessary to listen to the community and empower it to help you design the responses to the impacts of your project. One tool for achieving this is the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique for evaluation of your SIA impact.

MSC is a respected social science approach to evaluation research that collects stories from individuals in a target demographic or community about the significant changes they have experienced because of a project, policy, or event. These stories are then reviewed at consistent intervals by appointed people from the same population that the stories are collected from, a process that can occur one or more times. The final review is performed by a small panel of appointed individuals who are either proponents of or affected by the change that has taken place. The purpose of this review is to select the stories that show the most significant changes, good and bad, from the project, policy, or event that led to the study. This information can be used to demonstrate the kinds of impacts that a project has in a more detailed and humanised way than when collected from aggregated data or from initial research during an SIA. This makes it a good choice for follow-up research and community engagement when establishing or maintaining a SLO.

For a detailed approach on how to perform this kind of evaluation study, see the guide provided by the NSW Department of Education on its website which provides a structured way to design and implement this evaluation method.<sup>15</sup>

### 4.4.2 How to apply this principle to establishing SLO

In applying this principle to establishing SLO, you can employ a modified variation of a MSC evaluation that is focused on gathering stories from the community(s) about project impacts and how they think they will be affected by them. This should be done after a SIA is performed for the project, as the data from the SIA will give your participants the ability to consider how they might be affected by your project. With this use of MSC, community members can indicate the impacts of the project they are most concerned about through their accounts of how they believe these impacts will change their lives. You should then appoint willing participants from the community(s) to sort through these stories and highlight those that display the most prevalent concerns for project acceptance and operation.

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<sup>15</sup> NSW Government, 'Most Significant Change', *School learning environments and change*, (2021) URL = <<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-learning-environments-and-change/future-focused-learning-and-teaching/evaluation/most-significant-change>>



This will provide an indication of the priorities for your actions towards being a good neighbour and reciprocating the community's provision of SLO to you.

Genuinely working with your community involves empowering it to directly participate in the plans that you are undertaking to mitigate undesired impacts from your project. This can take many forms, such as community-run panels for local projects or the direct funding, endorsement, or resource support of local community groups, initiatives, facilities, or businesses through grants, dedication of staff time, or provision of independent expert support to understand technical issues. As an example, consider the landfilling company from Principle 2 and the desire of its community to secure land for a local fauna and flora reserve.

*Example: The landfilling company has reached an agreement with the community, committing to the construction of a dedicated environmental reserve on a portion of the land owned by the company. The company establishes a non-profit organisation with the community to administrate and preserve the space, recruit locally for employees to work at the reserve, and to organise community involvement in it.*

A strategy such as this also helps maintain SLO in the long term, as community members see that your willingness to be a good neighbour extends into community enrichment and participation, showing your investment in the people who care about their community and your project.

#### **4.4.3 How to apply this principle to maintaining SLO**

MSC can also serve well for long-term analysis of project impact. Once your project is operating, consider performing an MSC evaluation with the community to discover what the needs of the community are now that your facility is part of the life of the community. There could be new impacts from your project that were not known about during your SIA but are now apparent for the members of the community(s) who are invested in your project. It is your role as project operator to maintain your SLO by showing how you are considerate of your neighbours and those who are directly involved in your project. Performing an MSC a year or more into project operations supports this. Ideally, you should aim to perform MSC evaluations consistently across the duration of the project, at a rate that suits your operational abilities and resource commitments (if the community responds well to them). Hearing new stories and experiences from the community will keep you up to date on their views and provide the feedback and ideas for any review of your SLO strategy.

To be accepted, a facility needs to be a part of the community in which it operates. To do this companies and facility operators must collaborate and partner with their local community and support it to achieve better social and economic outcomes. Open days, sponsorship and mentoring programs are examples of doing this. But it's useful to think more broadly and enlist the views of knowledgeable community representatives. Your staff who live locally can also be your best ambassadors and a bridge to forming stronger ties in the community. They can also be a source of knowledge about other potential outreach initiatives. In order to maintain your SLO you should also be open to receiving criticism and addressing it, willing to provide your resources in times of community need and allowing the community to dictate the terms of that support.

Apply the *Precautionary Principle* to your operations and the decisions you make about facility performance. Let your community know you take this seriously and demonstrate how you do that. For example, you could limit the risk of harm to the environment or human health as a result of air emissions or other environmental releases by going beyond compliance with regulations and demonstrating better practice. Legislation and policies in many jurisdictions refer to consideration of the precautionary principle. For example, the Queensland Energy from Waste Policy refers to industrial growth and the emergence of new technologies and materials necessitating the use of a precautionary approach to avoid unintended impacts from current and emerging contaminants for all communities.

#### 4.4.4 Additional Resources

IAP2 has designed a Spectrum of Public Participation tool which can be used to help assess the adequate level of public participation or working in and with the community. The tool categorises the levels of impact on project operator decision making that the public participation strategies entail, whilst helping you frame your goals and promises to the public that come from your attempts to work in and with the community. An application to use this resource can be submitted on the IAP2 website, or an older version of the resource can be viewed as a free copy on its Publications page.

#### 4.4.5 Action Points

- Utilise your research and the work of your consultative committee to design plans for addressing Active Stakeholder concerns and meeting their needs and desires
- Engage your Active Stakeholders for feedback on these plans before implementation
- Modify and implement as indicated by the feedback
- Undertake the actions identified in your plans
- Engage your Active Stakeholders to evaluate the actions to determine if they are addressing concerns and meeting needs and desires
- Modify actions based on the feedback
- Engage relevant community members to participate in the actions where applicable

## 4.5 Principle 5: Trust is hard won but easily lost

It takes considerable effort over time to build trust, but it can be lost very quickly if you aren't actively maintaining it. To build trust you need to be open, honest and transparent. It also requires being proactive in admitting failings or mistakes and explaining what will be done to redress them. Reputational risk can be lowered when you work with your stakeholders to agree on what together you want to achieve, and you also agree on what public involvement is and the form it will take. You need to be clear you understand the results they want, commit to achieving them and make sure you carry out the actions accordingly. It is important to listen, be open and keep promises.

### 4.5.1 How to apply this principle to establishing SLO

To achieve trust from both community(s) and society requires a respectful, open and flexible attitude when dealing with your close community and all of your stakeholders. Table 4.5 provides guidance on applying these concepts. Building trusting relationships and having the willingness and ability to negotiate is another way of involving people in your business. To build trusting relationships you need to:

- accept and understand different points of view held by the public,
- be transparent in the way you think and act,
- communicate in a way that people can understand, and
- carry out your actions and words in a way that reinforces your intentions.

**Table 4.5: Principle 5 Guidance**

Considerations	Examples
How are you presenting yourself to the community?	Is your behaviour transparent? Are you being respectful and listening to community concerns? Have you given credit to the community for changes they've encouraged you to make? How are your communications efforts being received?
Is your behaviour garnering trust from the community?	This can be hard to gauge but will likely come down to how much the community listens to you, takes what you say at your word, and values your contributions and input. It's also how they talk about you when you are not in the room. The feedback from other parties (e.g., elected representatives, government officials, etc.) can be valuable in making this assessment. You may need to seek it out if it's positive, but you'll probably hear about it if it's not.

### 4.5.2 How to apply this principle to maintaining SLO

You have to earn people's respect to deserve a good public reputation and maintain a SLO. This requires active and deliberate work that has to be continued over time. Make sure to regularly ask

questions about the work you are doing and how your stakeholders are being involved. Take the opportunity to encourage new staff or independent parties to test these actions and your assumptions as they can have a unique perspective to those who have been in the organisation for a while or had the responsibility of community engagement for some time. Encourage people (especially those that are new to the relationship with you) to ask questions about the way you operate and engage with them while they still have fresh eyes, before you (or they) start to think “we do it like this, because we’ve always done it this way”.

A core part of ensuring that you have long term trust from your Active Stakeholders is continuing to apply all of the SLO principles and keeping to your commitments. If you were to pull back from an agreed upon solution to an impact your project has on the community without warning, or similarly disregarding the input from the community without respectfully explaining why you were not undertaking the action expected of you, any future SLO maintenance activities and operations you undertake will be viewed with skepticism at best or as cynical at worst. At its most extreme, a loss of trust can directly lead to active stakeholders who oppose the project gaining public support, or otherwise being empowered, by responding to the perceived untrustworthiness of the project operator. Oppositional active stakeholders can use this to court passive stakeholders, such as government, consumers, and investors, to help delay, increase restrictions around, remove support, or ban the project outright.

### 4.5.3 Action Points

- Ensure you have open and clear methods of communication with the community
- Be forthcoming in fulfilling requests (where legally possible) when being asked for information on operations, practices, and project details by the community
- If information is unable to be provided, or a request is unable to be fulfilled, be honest and transparent about why this is the case and present an alternative to achieve the desired outcome
- Follow through on commitments, promises, and plans made when adhering to the other principles, and publicly display what you have done

## 4.6 Principle 6: Demonstrate value

The value of your facility, either through its operations or through its output, will not be accepted by a community if it does not appreciate the benefit to it, or if it perceives the cost as being too great. Understanding your stakeholders means understanding what the community(s) values are, and how your enterprise can align with or support them. Without a proper demonstration of the value that your project provides to the community(s), a simple cost-benefit analysis by them will determine your project is not worth supporting, and accordingly your SLO will not be established or will degrade.

Costs are not always equally shared between communities or different members of a single community. Not adequately displaying the value of your project to all community members can lead to pockets of resistance, that can damage or erode SLO maintenance over time.

### 4.6.1 The role of your project in the Circular Economy

The transition to a circular economy is a priority for all Australian jurisdictions, federal, state, territory and local government. Most jurisdictions have waste strategies, policies and plans to realise this. A circular economy is based on the principles of designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems. The circular economy is proving to be an increasingly important concept to the community stakeholders that waste and resource recovery projects interact with. For example, EfW and landfilling projects across the east coast of Australia have come up against resistance from the local communities and community activist groups as these projects are seen by these groups to undermine the efforts of other waste and resource recovery initiatives such as avoidance and recycling, and their value is not well understood.

All sectors of the waste and resource recovery industry including composting, material recovery and EfW facilities, are critical to achieving a circular economy. You need to adequately explain the role of your facility in the circular economy, and the outcomes and benefits it can help achieve (e.g., soil nutrient replenishment, supporting on shore remanufacturing, recovering energy, reducing greenhouse gases). For example, for EfW explain that transitioning from the current linear 'take-make-use-dispose' model to a truly circular economy will take time. During this period, EfW provides an opportunity to capture the embodied energy in residual waste materials that would otherwise be lost if disposed to landfill.<sup>16</sup>

Even communities opposed to EfW facilities have expressed a deep appreciation for the progress towards a circular economy. Being able to show EfW as a technology supporting a circular economy relies on them believing that the information you provide is true. This is just one example of how Principle 5 and 6 are linked. It will be very hard if not impossible to convince people of the value of your project or facility, beyond that to shareholders, if you have not established trust first.

### 4.6.2 How to apply this principle to establishing SLO

Establishing your value to a community is not as simple as describing the immediate benefits of the service you provide, or the long-term benefits of local jobs or economic stimulus to a region through your operations. These are important things that your project can provide a community, but when demonstrating value to a community as a part of establishing SLO, it is more important to demonstrate

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<sup>16</sup> Queensland Government, *Guideline: Energy from Waste (2021)*, Version 1.00, URL = <  
[https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/227241/waste-strategy-guideline-energy-from-waste.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/227241/waste-strategy-guideline-energy-from-waste.pdf)>

how you meet both the needs and wants of the community from a new business in their neighbourhood.

You should use your various stakeholder engagement and research activities that are part of applying the other principles to find out what the community(s) values. This can include things that your business inherently provides or are within the scope of its operations, but it can also include things that might require active investment of resources, capital, or time on the part of your business to meet these values. There is no point in attempting to signal to a community that you provide something of value when it does not recognise it as such.

For example, a project that is opposed by a community in a high employment area on the grounds that it is perceived as impacting the environment will not benefit from the project operator highlighting the value of the jobs the project will bring. If the community already has (or does not care about) what you are offering as your main contribution, then you are not demonstrating your value to them. Your community may not value local employment, as highly as environmental sustainability and human and ecosystem health. Demonstrating that your industry, business, or project can actually appeal to these values and how it can meet the wants and needs of the community(s) is how this Principle is involved in establishing SLO.

If you have ensured that your community trusts you to do the right thing by them (Principle 5), it is much easier to communicate the value of your operations, as they will be less sceptical about any claims that you make. This is not always easy to define but Table 4.6 provides some examples of the things you should consider when trying to determine what your community(s) values.

**Table 4.6: Principle 6 Guidance**

Considerations	Examples
How will you demonstrate the value that your operations bring to the community(s)?	<p>Understand the community’s concerns e.g., waste creation and management, environmental sustainability, climate change and explain how your operations are part of the systemic solution to these challenges.</p> <p>Open your operations to the public, encourage them to see how you work, the products you produce or materials you manage and how that investment and effort has societal value.</p>
Does the community prefer the idea of immediate benefits or is long-term value more important to them?	<p>Understand what is important to community groups or individuals.</p> <p>Shape your responses to their needs. E.g., there is little point in emphasising the greenhouse gas reductions your activities provide if the desire is for an immediate benefit to be realised.</p>

### 4.6.3 How to apply this principle to maintaining SLO

As with many of the principles in this toolkit, maintaining SLO requires being adaptive over the long-term in how you implement Principle 6 in your SLO strategy. The values of active stakeholders will change over time as external and internal pressures shape changes to communities and society. To keep up with the changing values of your active stakeholders, you should look to your employees and

your local community as a frame of reference for whether you need to change anything. You can use your research and stakeholder engagement that underpin the other principles to maintain an up-to-date understanding of what is expected of you in producing something of value in the long term.

#### 4.6.4 Action Points

- Use the information you have gathered through stakeholder engagement and public consultation to understand and define the values that are important to your relevant communities
- Develop new operational models, or modify existing operations, for your project that are in line with the values of your target community
- Implement and refine the services and projects that your target community values
- Repeat this process consistently throughout your project or facility's lifecycle

## 4.7 Principle 7: Don't assume your authority

You may have the land use planning approval to develop your project or the legal permission to operate your facility or you might own the land that the project is taking place on, but it does not mean that the community will accept you have a right to force your presence on them. Make sure not to assume a position of authority when engaging with the community(s) or the broader society. Doing so will have a negative impact on both the gaining and maintaining of your SLO, and likely alienate people who may otherwise support your presence, or at least have a neutral view about it.

Assuming authority will negatively influence your stakeholder engagement, feed resentment and drive outrage. Be receptive to people's concerns and allow them to steer or take control of developing solutions. Negotiations from a position of assumed power are unlikely to reach satisfactory conclusions or achieve any longevity. Displaying an assumed authority to operate is counterproductive to achieving the other principles described here. Table 4.7 provides some guidance on the steps you can take to demonstrate your willingness to cede control and build the trust needed to overcome scepticism.

**Table 4.7: Principle 7 Guidance**

Considerations	Examples
Are you aware of how your authority, and the way that you are choosing to use or not use it, is being perceived?	If you're making decisions that would be impactful on the community without consulting the community first, this could be seen as an over-step-in authority.
How can you display humility and be genuine about it?	<p>Giving the community credit for relevant decision-making.</p> <p>Allowing community members to have control in the business planning process.</p> <p>Accepting responsibility for missteps and wrongdoing.</p>
<p>How can you facilitate and encourage members of the community to actively engage in operational decisions that will affect them?</p> <p>Is it possible to give them a controlling role through active decision making?</p>	<p>Open and consistent dialogue.</p> <p>Stepping back from an authoritative role.</p> <p>Increasing community participation in decision-making processes.</p>

### 4.7.1 How to apply this principle to establishing SLO

When establishing SLO from your Active Stakeholders, Principle 7 can be conceived as not relying on the legal permissions that you have to locate, build, and operate your project in the face of active stakeholder opposition. Respecting your stakeholders is fundamental to a SLO, and it will translate into a better relationship where your project and business are understood and viewed more positively by your stakeholders. Without respect, a positive relationship will not form, and an antagonistic relationship will instead be more likely to fill the void. Having an antagonistic relationship with your Active Stakeholders means that they are more likely to form coalitions or otherwise organise opposition towards your project. At its worst, an antagonistic relationship can compromise your right to operate; legal authority or government approval can be revoked if Active Stakeholders put pressure on Passive Stakeholders to act in their interest. A respect for your Active Stakeholders means that they will respect your right to operate.



#### 4.7.2 How to apply this principle to maintaining SLO

Other than the circumstances of how you might impose your authority, the approaches to both establishing and maintaining SLO are similar. For maintaining SLO, you should be wary of damaging your position as a good neighbour. If you were to take your right to operate and prioritise it over Active Stakeholder concerns about your operations, you will find that much of the good will generated while establishing your SLO disappears quickly. As outlined in Principle 5, not honouring your promises and commitments made when establishing SLO is sure to lose the faith of the community. A business that is perceived as claiming to have the authority to determine what actions constitute honouring a promise over the perspective of Active Stakeholders could find itself losing SLO with its previous supporters.

It is important that you do not take a heavy-handed approach to your engagement with your Active Stakeholders. Telling them how you intend to go about ensuring their support is a very quick way to lose it. Adhering to the principles of SLO establishment and maintenance means retaining an open approach to communication and deliberation with your Active Stakeholders throughout, and potentially after, the lifecycle of your project.

#### 4.7.3 Action Points

- Engage with your Active Stakeholders as equals
- Ensure that you are not using legal authority or financial resources to persuade or undermine Active Stakeholder input
- Consult with your Active Stakeholders on any impacts that might affect them
- Give credit to Active Stakeholders for their part in decisions that you have made or processes you have changed
- Accept and apologise for any missteps or wrongdoing on your part
- Empower Active Stakeholders to make specific decisions and determine directions

## 4.8 Principle 8: Don't let a small risk become a huge outrage: Risk = Hazard + Outrage

The traditional approach to risk mitigation, that is, understanding hazards and the likelihood of their occurrence, can miss the underlying cause of opposition to a project or an existing operation. When you are dealing with community outrage, responding with facts, figures, scientific expertise, and the engineering performance of controls sometimes isn't enough. Outrage is very difficult to overcome once it takes hold. Trust is lost and difficult to regain. When people are angry or scared about a small hazard the usual approach from project operators is to try and calm them down.

How do you do this if 'they won't listen to reason'? How do you respond to people who are scared of risks experts say are small or acceptable? When people are outraged trying to convince them that the risk is not as serious as they think is unlikely to succeed without first reducing the outrage. Peter Sandman (PhD), an internationally renowned risk communication specialist who coined the *Risk = Hazard + Outrage* equation says that the strategies that actually work turn out to be profoundly counterintuitive: apologising for your mistakes, giving others credit for your improvements, and acknowledging their grievances and concerns<sup>17</sup>. He says that people assess risks according to metrics other than their technical seriousness: that factors such as trust, control, voluntariness, dread, and familiarity are as important as mortality or morbidity in understanding risk.

Proponents or facility operators whose projects, or who themselves are on the receiving end of community outrage often make the mistake of assuming that their stakeholders are upset due to their ignorance, media sensationalism, or activist distortions. Understanding the dynamics of stakeholder outrage is essential to determining how to reduce it. Sometimes this is as straightforward as stopping or not doing the things that provoked the outrage in the first place. Local outrage can build from the public outrage of activists or the media, but it's equally likely to build from the outrage of friends and neighbours. It's easier to express your outrage about risks from a local facility through local collective action than about broader societal risks.

Reducing outrage is therefore a socially valuable thing to do. However, there are ethical issues to be mindful of when engaging in outrage management. It is only acceptable to reduce outrage if the outrage is misplaced. That is, if the hazard, or actual risk, is known or genuinely understood to be small. Table 4.8 provides guidance in response to outrage. Consider how you engage if people have stopped listening to you. Do you have senior management or board support to admit mistakes? How can you get this? Are you willing to credit others even when you feel the credit should be yours? How serious is the issue, is it the ethical thing to do to reduce the outrage? Consider the outrage factors.

**Table 4.8: Principle 8 Guidance**

Considerations	Examples
How do you go about engaging with the community and society in response to outrage?	Acknowledge their outrage. Admit your mistakes. Give credit to the community for raising the issues or instigating your actions to fix them.

<sup>17</sup> Sandman, Peter (2020) *The Peter M. Sandman Risk Communication Website*, URL = <https://www.psandman.com/>

<p>What if they have stopped listening to you?</p>	<p>This is where the work you've put in through adhering to all the other principles potentially pays off.</p> <p>If you know your community, have established relationships that are trusted and demonstrated your integrity you can seek to utilise these to open the dialogue again.</p>
<p>Is the situation serious enough that people should be outraged?</p>	<p>If there is a legitimate crisis that is caused by your operations, you should accept responsibility and act decisively and swiftly to protect people and the environment. Don't hesitate to tell them what the problem is and what you are doing about it. Tell them how they will be protected. Redress any harm caused. Keep them informed of progress and actions. This is crisis management (high hazard, high outrage) and should not confused with outrage management.</p>

#### 4.8.1 How to apply this principle to establishing SLO

For most projects, the principle of outrage identification and management is not directly applicable to establishing SLO, however it is necessary to acknowledge it if you are entering a community where there is a legacy of concern for your industry, or the type of facility you are proposing. Where there has been outrage in the past and it hasn't been adequately addressed, the resulting antagonism will remain, and you will need to acknowledge and understand it before you can attempt to establish your SLO.

The principles articulated in this toolkit will assist in addressing this. Principles 1, 2, and some of the tools and approaches mentioned should help you to determine if outrage persists. Even if it doesn't, understanding the history of business and community interactions that led to the outrage is important in establishing SLO. Trust is critically important in managing outrage and establishing this through the application of Principle 5 is fundamental to being able to demonstrate the differences between how you intend to pursue SLO and the approach and actions of others before you.

#### 4.8.2 How to apply this principle to maintaining SLO

The identification of outrage, and how it is acknowledged and addressed is critical to maintaining your SLO. You will quickly lose it if outrage develops, as once it takes holds it is very difficult to manage completely. Early warning is a key factor, and this can be achieved through actively managing the relationship you have developed with your community through the effective application of the preceding principles. Understanding the timing and nature of changes in community sentiment will allow you to prepare a strategy in response.

However, approaching outrage with the typical strategy of explaining the risks better and validating your assessment of the risk using data and experts is unlikely to work when people are upset, angry, or scared. You should still do this, but outrage will remain even though you corrected a misperception or educated people about the probability of a hazard. Instead, or as well, you need to take their views

seriously, acknowledge their concerns and anger, and include your community in the decisions about how risks will be managed.

If people voluntarily expose themselves to risk (e.g., smoking or not wearing a seatbelt) the hazards are significantly more likely to be accepted than when they are forced upon them (e.g., a polluting facility in their neighbourhood). One strategy to make the risk more acceptable is to make it more voluntary. To paraphrase Sandman, the right to say no makes saying maybe easier. Another is to not hide potentially negative assessments or bad news. Anything you say about a problem cannot be as bad as saying nothing at all and being presumed to have ignored it.

Because of the nature of the substances it can contain, the management of waste sometimes raises fear and dread in people. This needs to be acknowledged before the actual low level of risk can be explained and understood, and consequently the controls accepted. Acknowledging the dread helps people put it into context. For example, few people have the skills and expertise to assess the toxicity of an air pollutant, but most will feel they can readily tell if someone is trustworthy.

Sharing control is also important. If you bring your community into your operations through activities like advisory committees, and they feel they have some control, people are more likely to accept your assurances about risks and how they will be managed. You can effectively reduce outrage by finding and agreeing upon how you will share control. Further, by empowering your community it is unlikely to feel it is being 'bought off' when you come to sharing the benefits of your project through Principles 3 and 4. When this negotiation results in a public benefit there is likely to be a greater sense or perception of fairness from the community. This is important in some waste related activities where the impacts can be seen by the local community as unfair because they are shouldering the burden for others (e.g., waste from the wider community being managed or processed in their neighbourhood).

The key elements to recognising and addressing outrage are (as adapted from Peter Sandman PhD);

- Respond openly, acknowledge past mistakes and current problems;
- Find ways to ask permission and give away credit;
- Get all of the underlying issues and motivations into the open;
- Don't compare the risks you are imposing with natural or personally accepted risks;
- Make the risk more familiar by explaining the bad news;
- Recognise and legitimate fear and dread;
- Share control, empower people, and be accountable; and
- Share the benefits more fairly.

If outrage takes hold the steps above will assist you to address it and to hopefully regain the SLO you will have lost as a result. Effectively applying the other seven principles will mean that you have a solid foundation on which to regain your SLO in these circumstances but more importantly the diligent application of those principles should mean outrage does not arise in the first place.

### 4.8.3 Action Points

- Understand and acknowledge any legacy concerns that the target community has
- Use your Active Stakeholders and engagement channels to identify outrage before it takes hold
- Acknowledge outrage as soon as it emerges from a community and admit your mistakes

- Give the outraged community credit for their part in identifying the concern and initiating your plan to respond to it
- Communicate transparently with Active Stakeholders about problems and risks that arise from your operations regardless of whether they have been identified by them
- Act swiftly to resolve any legitimate crises that have occurred

## 5 The principles in practice from some EfW examples

Below are three examples from the EfW sector of the application of one or more the SLO principles. EfW is attracting a high level of investment interest and support, and as a relatively new industry in Australia, is attracting a lot of public scrutiny and adverse reaction in some locations. The following examples should assist in developing a good understanding of how SLO establishment and maintenance can be done, and perhaps applied to the waste and recovered resources industry as a whole.

### 5.1 CopenHill EfW Facility

The Amager Resource Centre, or CopenHill, was commissioned in 2018 and conceived with the premise that power plants do not need to be ugly. It is located in the heart of Copenhagen, Denmark, about 300 metres from residential areas. CopenHill is an EfW plant capable of processing 440,000 tons of waste per annum (tpa) into energy. It has been constructed to double as a public amenity in the form of a ski slope and entertainment venue.<sup>18</sup> The facility has a range of activities aimed at Copenhagen locals, including a climbable façade, a roof made for hiking, and ski slopes across the length of the facility. CopenHill also includes a workout area on the top of the facility, a bar, and a garden alongside its hiking trail that helps increase environmental integrity in Copenhagen through absorbing air particles, mitigating storm water run-off, and providing a safe haven for local fauna. CopenHill has approximately 300,000 visitors a year and won World Building of the Year 2021.

### 5.2 Dublin Waste to Energy Community Gain Fund

To support the SLO of its 600,000 tpa EfW facility in Dublin Ireland that was commissioned in 2017, Dublin Waste to Energy Limited established the Dublin Waste to Energy Community Gain Fund, which includes a once-off 3% financial contribution based on the capital cost of the facility, and annual contributions per tonne of waste accepted for thermal treatment at the plant.<sup>19</sup> The fund provides financial support to community initiatives in the areas of Irishtown, Ringsend, and Sandymount by way of empowering activities based in education, environmental stewardship, recreation, and community building. Since 2014, €11,000,000 has been credited to the fund by the developer of the plant.

### 5.3 Parkes (NSW) Special Activation Precinct

The Special Activation Precinct (SAP) approach is an example of early engagement and the groundwork needed to establish SLO. The SAP is located three kilometres west of the township of Parkes, NSW. Its strategic location takes advantage of the Sydney to Perth and Brisbane to Melbourne rail corridors. It has strong sustainability and circular economy principles and will become Australia's first UNIDO Eco-Industrial Park. The design of the Parkes project is based on providing for the needs and desires of the residents of the local communities. A Resource and Recycling Sub-Precinct will deliver critical

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<sup>18</sup> Cook, Lizzie, 'BIG opens Copenhill power plant topped with rooftop ski slope in Copenhagen' (2019), *Dezeen*, URL = <<https://www.dezeen.com/2019/10/08/big-copenhill-power-plant-ski-slope-copenhagen/>>

<sup>19</sup> Dublin City Council, 'Dublin Waste to Energy Community Gain Fund' (2022), URL = <<https://www.dublincity.ie/residential/environment/dwte-community-gain-fund/dublin-waste-energy-community-gain-fund#:~:text=The%20Community%20Gain%20Fund%20provides,as%20defined%20on%20the%20map>>

infrastructure designed to stimulate economic development and employment in Parkes, with the aim of making it an eco-industrial hub of sustainability. Proposals have been sought to fund, develop, and operate a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) and an EfW facility within the SAP.

A circular economy within the sub-precinct will minimise waste and make the most of resources. The MRF will accept and process a range of materials into suitable streams for recycling and reprocessing. The EfW facility will receive residual materials from reprocessing/remanufacturing industries to further divert waste from landfill and generate renewable energy. The EfW facility will likely also accept processed materials from one or more 'dirty' MRFs located outside of the Parkes SAP. The key sustainability objectives include delivering initiatives that benefit local communities, minimising carbon emissions and maximising energy efficiency.

Very early in the SAP establishment process the NSW government worked with local communities and other key stakeholders to obtain support, and a social licence, for the state significant regional development. The government has continued to involve local stakeholders in varied engagement activities to establish and maintain SLO for the project. Specific information has been developed to support the social licence of the proposed facility including fact sheets on air emissions and management of perceived health risks, case studies from Europe and else-where on EFw operations, and Q&As for EfW projects. A series of 'briefing sessions' have been held with the Parkes community to engage them in the project. The prospective operator will use this information and these activities to establish the project's social licence and as a mechanism to continue engaging with the community.



Assets | Engineering | Environment | Noise | Spatial | Waste

**Talis Consultants**

**Head Office**

Level 1, 604 Newcastle Street  
Leederville WA 6007

PO Box 454  
Leederville WA 6903

**NSW Office**

76 Bridge Road  
Nowra NSW 2541

PO Box 1189  
Nowra NSW 2541

P: 1300 251 070

E: [info@talisconsultants.com.au](mailto:info@talisconsultants.com.au)